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SUBJECT: ITALIAN DEFENSE MINISTER ADDRESSES EUROPEAN SECURITY

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Tom Countryman for Reasons 1.5(b)(d)

¶1. (U) Italian Defense Minister Antonio Martino reiterated the need for Europe to improve actual military capabilities while building a European security concept that continues to features NATO as its core. Speaking at the Italian Defense Academy recently, Martino noted that the traditional, narrow concept of European defense is expanding to reflect a wider, collective security concept aimed at guaranteeing stability, preventing conflicts, battling global terrorism and halting the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

¶2. (U) NATO will continue to be indispensable, Martino emphasized, adding that any detachment from NATO must absolutely be avoided as it would be overly ambitious, duplicative and wasteful. Europe should aim at creating an effective force that can act under NATO or European command, and should take advantage of the experience and cooperative mechanisms already in place, adjusting them if needed, he stated. Other EU DefMins had responded positively to Italy's plan for achieving by 2010 an interoperable European force that can conduct any type of mission, anywhere, Martino noted, a goal set by Javier Solana in June 2003.

¶3. (U) Martino said he is less worried about the particulars of EU defense concepts than he is about the growing gap between US and European capabilities. He blamed excessive media attention for generating unwarranted fears about autonomous EU defense plans. The greater risk, according to Martino, is the qualitative and quantitative gap between US and European capabilities, which makes it increasingly difficult to conduct joint operations. The EU spends about one-half of what the US spends on defense but gets only about ten percent of the capability the US attains. The deficit results from each EU member trying to have a complete repertoire of capabilities, which results in inefficient duplications that reduce the EU's overall capacity, he explained. Within the EU, as between the EU and NATO, the goal must be complementarity, not duplication or competition.

¶4. (U) The proposed European Defense Agency will be an important step toward more efficient collaboration and use of limited resources, Martino said. The Agency will have a central role in coordinating the policies of various sectors, overcoming duplications and harmonizing investments in research, development and acquisition of armaments. Europe needs to create a more efficient, expanded arms market that operates beyond narrow national interests for a more collective, continental approach, according to Martino. Consolidating and strengthening the industrial base and defense technology will benefit each EU member as well as the EU and NATO, he said, and will contribute to the development of national and European technology and production capabilities. Martino noted Italy's efforts, as EU President, to accelerate the creation of the Agency, which he said represents a fundamental step in the construction of EU defense and security.

¶5. (U) What this means for Italy, according to Martino, is that defense spending must be linked to a smooth and rapid modernization of the Italian military. Failure in the past to spend on recapitalization measures must now be remedied, despite the shortage of resources and current difficult economic conditions. The resources that are available should be concentrated on filling essential missing capabilities.

¶6. (U) Martino also stressed the importance of remaining in Iraq until a functioning democracy and economy have been established. (Comment: Even before the November 12 bombing of the Carabinieri headquarters in Nassiyria that killed 19 Italians, Martino encouraged Italy to extend its participation in Iraqi reconstruction. He has become more public and more ardent about the need for Italy to stay since those Italian lives were lost.)

¶7. (C) Comment. Martino's message on building capabilities as the best way to strengthen European security is one he has delivered consistently and fervently since becoming defense minister in 2001. He has pushed the point hard during Italy's EU Presidency, both within the EU and NATO, always stressing that NATO is, and must remain, the primary security organization. Most importantly, he practices what he preaches by using Italy's limited defense funds to transform

and improve Italian military capabilities in ways that

strengthen the NATO alliance. End Comment.

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